

Wildland Fire Position Descriptions

This document gives brief position descriptions. The career tracks and career timelines are color coded to the [Fire Management Career Ladders](#) graphic.

Operations

Early Career

The majority of people in wildland fire management careers start their careers as a firefighter. These positions typically fall within a person's first four or five seasons as a firefighter. For additional information on "How to Become a Firefighter for seasonal positions please see > http://training.nwccg.gov/sect_firef_seasonal.htm

Firefighter => Engine Crew

Firefighters assigned to an engine crew suppress wildfires primarily using heavy-duty vehicles with water/foam delivery systems. Their duties include operating the engines that pump and distribute water or foam, driving the fire engines and communicating to facilitate suppression operations. They also engage in other fire suppression work, including fireline construction, preparing fire breaks, burning out control lines, mopping up, felling small trees and cutting brush using a chainsaw. When not fighting fire, engine crews usually do physical training and work projects like basic facilities maintenance, trail construction, thinning, and preparation of prescribed fire units.

Firefighter => Hand Crew

Firefighter assigned to hand crews suppress wildfires primarily via fireline construction. Hand crews often hike into wildland fires and encircle the fire by cutting a path (called a fireline) by removing rocks, leaves, twigs, brush, trees, and grasses between the fire and its future sources of fuel. Firelines are constructed using hand tools (shovels, pulaskis, mcleods, etc.) and chainsaws. Hand crews hold firelines by burning out fuels inside firelines and mopping up once a fire is contained. When not doing fire suppression, hand crews do physical training, and projects like basic facilities maintenance, trail construction, thinning, and preparation of prescribed fire units.

Hotshot Crew member

Hotshot crews usually hire firefighters who have gained experience on other crews. Hotshot crews typically receive more annual training and take on tougher fireline assignments than engine crews and regular firefighting crews (as listed above). Hotshot crews do the same basic kind of firefighting as any other hand crew, but Hotshot crews are expected to be in better physical condition and have more fire experience than regular crews. Hotshot crew members (in general) work longer hours and travel to more remote fires and more remote sections of fires than regular crews.

Squad Leader => Engine Crew

A squad leader on an engine crew performs the same basic work as other firefighters on an engine crew, but has an added layer of responsibility—leadership. Squad leaders supervise small groups of crew members to ensure assignments are completed safely, on time, and to an acceptable standard. Squad leaders must thoroughly understand the tasks of the crew, and they must exercise the judgment and decision making necessary to meet the crew’s objectives.

Squad Leader => Hand Crew

A squad leader on a hand crew performs the same basic work as other firefighters on a hand crew, but has an added layer of responsibility—leadership. Squad leaders supervise small groups of crew members to ensure assignments are completed safely, on time, and to an acceptable standard. Squad leaders must thoroughly understand the crew’s job, and they must exercise the judgment and decision making necessary to meet the crew’s objectives.

Mid-Career

Once an employee gains some solid experience in firefighting operations, career-minded firefighters will usually transition into typical mid-career roles, which often include supervisory and entry-level managerial jobs. For additional information on “How to Become a Firefighter” for permanent positions please see > http://training.nwcg.gov/sect_firef_full.htm

Engine Crew Supervisor

An engine crew supervisor’s primary responsibility is leading his or her crew in the safe and effective completion of assigned work—on and off the fireline. This role includes administrative duties like timekeeping and travel record-keeping. Supervisors will receive advanced training in fire suppression skills, plus training in leadership and supervision. Supervisors are expected to execute fireline assignments with a minimal amount of operational oversight.

Hand Crew Supervisor

A hand crew supervisor’s primary responsibility is leading his or her crew in the safe and effective completion of assigned work—on and off the fireline. This role also includes administrative duties, like timekeeping and travel record-keeping. Supervisors will receive advanced training in fire suppression skills, plus training in leadership and supervision. Supervisors are expected to execute fireline assignments with a minimal amount of operational oversight.

Fire Operations Specialist

The job of a fire operations specialist (FOS) is best described as a supervisor of fire crew supervisors. Outside of fire suppression, a FOS may assist with seasonal hiring and crew training, organizing crew work schedules, and developing and monitoring project work. When wildfires are burning, a FOS will typically take on mid- to high level managerial roles on locally managed wildfires. These duties may include forming strategies and tactics to attack a fire, assigning crews and other resources, assessing the fire’s threats to life and property, and organizing logistical support for the personnel assigned to the fire.

Hotshot Crew Superintendent

The leader of a Hotshot crew program, the superintendent oversees an individual Hotshot crew. He or she develops and administers the crew's budget; manages the annual hiring and training of the crew; manages the crew's transportation and equipment needs; and leads the crew on fire assignments. This position embraces a wider scope than typical hand crew supervisor positions, because Hotshot crews are standing national resources. Up to half the crew may be permanent employees. Further, agency policies require Hotshot crew superintendents to possess fireline qualifications significantly beyond those held by a regular fire crew supervisor.

Assistant Fire Management Officer

The Assistant Fire Management Officer (AFMO) is a principal assistant to a unit's fire management officer. The job of an AFMO often includes tasks similar to that of a fire operations specialist, but with some added areas of responsibility. These extra responsibilities may include helping develop and administer the unit's fire management budget; planning and administering project work; personnel management (hiring firefighters, training, resolving pay issues, etc.); supervision of fire operation specialists and crew supervisors; and providing fire program support to other programs on your unit.

Later Career

Employees with 10 to 15 years of experience in Fire Management (and a track record of increasing levels of responsibility) will typically have built up enough experience and training to take on higher levels of responsibility. Note: the further a person advances in fire management, the less his or her job will involve operations and the more it will involve administration. Similarly, higher level jobs become increasingly competitive and usually require applicants to have strong educational backgrounds in addition to experience.

Fire Management Officer

The Fire Management Officer is the leader of a local unit's fire program. This job includes risk management, budgeting, assembling and leading a staff, work planning, and integrating fire management with a unit's other resource areas.

Assistant Fire Staff Officer

The Assistant Fire Staff Officer is the deputy program lead for a larger administrative unit in the federal system.

Fire Staff Officer

The Fire Staff Officer is the program lead for a larger administrative unit in the federal system.

Fire Aviation

Early Career

Helicopter Module Member

Firefighters who work on helicopter modules may engage in several kinds of fire suppression work. Helitack and heli-rappellers are firefighters who travel to emerging fires via helicopter. Once on the ground, these firefighters do much the same work as a Hotshot crew member, albeit in smaller groups. Helicopter modules also use their skills to manage the transportation of personnel and supplies to and from remote locations on fires. They may set up and manage remote helicopter landing sites. Helicopter module members may also monitor low-intensity wilderness fires being managed for resource benefits.

Smokejumper

A smokejumper is an advanced and skilled firefighter who travels to isolated or emerging fires via airplane and parachute. Smokejumpers are often hired from the ranks of Hotshot crews or helicopter modules. Smokejumpers receive specialized training in parachuting and air operations. Equipment, tools, and essential supplies are dropped near fires which enables these firefighters to undertake suppression actions in inaccessible and remote areas self-sufficiently for longer durations of time. On fires, smokejumpers usually work in smaller crew configurations. Smokejumpers have to meet stringent physical standards and learn and demonstrate certain skills related to performance under difficult conditions.

Mid-Career

Helicopter Module Squad Leader

The Squad Leader on a helicopter module is the first-line supervisor of part of the module (which may number anywhere from five to 20 people). The squad leader must be skilled at all tasks expected of a helicopter module and have the ability to supervise small groups of crew members in the execution of assignments. A Squad Leader will also be trained to manage a helispot or helibase, and perform the basic duties of a helicopter contracting officer's technical representative.

Smokejumper Spotter

A smokejumper spotter is an experienced smokejumper who functions as the mission leader on the air operations side of the smokejumping assignment. The spotter assesses wind, weather and fire behavior factors and determines if the jump will happen. He or she also coordinates the mission with the local dispatch office; selects the smokejumpers' landing site; manages the jumping operation; and drops cargo from the jump aircraft.

Helicopter Program/Base Manager

This position is in charge of a helicopter-based fire management program (a helitack or heli-rappeller crew). The incumbent administers the helicopter contract; oversees the base staff; develops and administers the program's budget; oversees the annual training for module members and squad leaders; and manages the equipment used by the program.

Pilot

Some fire aviation personnel pursue licensure as a pilot and may eventually work into an aircraft pilot position with an agency. Pilots are responsible for the safe planning, preparation, and execution of missions in support of fire management activities. Fire aviation pilots, however, are not required to have experience as a ground firefighter.

Unit Aviation Officer or Manager

A unit aviation officer (or manager) is responsible for the administration of the unit's aviation program. This would include aircraft contract administration; compliance with FAA regulations governing use of aircraft used in support of civilian wildland fire operations; and the assurance of overall safe operations of that unit's aircraft on and off the unit.

Later Career

Smokejumper Program/Base Manager

The base manager of a smokejumper program manages all aspects of a smokejumper program. This includes administration of personnel, budget, aircraft contracting, equipment and transportation, base protocols, operational logistics, facilities and record keeping.

State or Regional Aviation Manager

The State or Regional Aviation Manager for an agency is responsible for the administration of a state or regional aviation program. This role includes ensuring that all aircraft uses comply with applicable laws and policies. This manager assures that mission-appropriate aircraft are being contracted at a reasonable cost, that units are in compliance with safety protocols, and that appropriate crew configurations are being used.

National Aviation Manager

The National Aviation Manager for an agency is responsible for the administration of an agency's national aviation program. This administration includes ensuring that all aircraft uses comply with applicable laws and policies. Also, this manager assures that suitable aircraft are being contracted at a reasonable cost, and that appropriate crew configurations are being used. This person manages a staff that has responsibilities for various national program areas (budget, training, contracting, etc.).

Fuels Management

Early Career

Fuels Crew Member

A member of a fuel crew is essentially a firefighter on a crew whose day to day job entails fuels reduction work. This kind of work typically involves thinning excess vegetation and piling the thinned material in ways that it can be burned later. Fuels crew members also prepare landscapes for prescribed fire by constructing fire containment lines. When wildfires occur, fuels crews are used much the same as other small firefighting hand crews.

Fuels Technician

Fuels technicians generally work independently as field personnel in support of a unit fuels program. Their work involves measuring and documenting the presence of natural fuels and fuels related to human activity (i.e. thinning and logging). Fuels technicians also monitor the effects of fuels treatments, monitor smoke emissions from prescribed burning, and assist with prescribed burning projects.

Prescribed Fire Monitor

Prescribed fire monitors work on units with large fuels treatment programs. This person's role involves measuring, monitoring and documenting effects of various fuels treatment projects and methods, especially prescribed burning. The documentation generated by the prescribed fire monitor is important in measuring the unit's compliance with various laws and regulations, especially those related to ensuring clean air and water, and reforestation.

Mid-Career

Prescribed Fire Manager

The Prescribed Fire Manager manages a unit's prescribed fire program. He or she is responsible for the planning, preparation, and implementation of the unit's prescribed burning program. This role also includes accurate record-keeping of accomplishments, ensuring that various targets are met in accordance with a schedule and budget, and monitoring prescribed burns to ensure the fires do not escape containment lines after the burning has been conducted.

Fire Planner

Planners have the responsibility for research, development, planning, preparation, and execution of a comprehensive fuels management program on a unit. This includes selecting areas in need of fuels treatment; developing appropriate methods to reduce fuels; developing a budget necessary to fund the program; scheduling equipment and personnel for fire operations; addressing safety and risk management necessary to conduct fuels treatment projects. They are familiar with wildland fire behavior and factor in weather conditions and ecological fire effects when implementing projects. The work with geographic information systems data, administer contracts, develop and support environmental compliance, and report accomplishments. Planners have less operational involvement with projects than prescribed fire managers.

Later Career

State/Regional Prescribed Fire Manager

The State or Regional Prescribed Fire Manager is responsible for ensuring that all prescribed fire projects comply with applicable laws and policies. This position manages a regional budget, including determining how funds are distributed among units in that state or region. This position also assures that attainment statistics are tracked, collected, and reported.

National Fuels Program Manager

The National Prescribed Fire Manager manages an agency's national prescribed fire program, including developing and modifying policy and standards. This position manages a national budget, including determining how funds are distributed by state or region. Also, this manager assures that attainment statistics are tracked, aggregated and reported.

Dispatch

Early Career

Dispatcher

Dispatchers receive fire reports, calculate the fire's location, and send resources to incidents—typically wildfires. Once firefighters arrive at the incident, dispatchers coordinate communication between the incident and the agency. Dispatchers handle requests from the fire for everything from additional personnel and equipment to extra drinking water. Dispatchers also relay important weather information to fire personnel, keep detailed records related to fire response, and keep track of the locations and status of all available firefighting resources. Some dispatchers focus on tracking and dispatching a single type of resource (like aircraft, for example) as opposed to handling any call that comes over the radio.

Dispatchers may be employed at any of the three response levels in the U.S.: local dispatch centers, geographic area coordination centers (GACCs), and the National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC) in Boise, ID. Though the scope of work at these three different levels of the system varies greatly, the basic work is comparable.

Mid-Career

Assistant Center Manager Local Dispatch

An Assistant Center Manager helps manage a local dispatch center in the areas of staff scheduling and supervision; the development and implementation of communication and dispatch protocols; decision-making to resolve resource mobilization and transportation issues; and database upkeep associated with training and qualification records.

Logistics Coordinator

Logistics coordinators typically work at GACCs or NICC. Their work is similar to that of a dispatcher, though they do not dispatch for individual fires. The focus of a logistics coordinator

is the coordinated movement of resources nationally or within a geographic area in a timely, efficient and cost-effective manner.

Intelligence Officer

Building on journey-level experience in dispatching and logistics coordination, some dispatch employees diversify their career by pursuing an intelligence officer role. Intelligence officers integrate fuels, weather and climate data to compile various reports. They also compile, track and report fire statistics and other information.

Later Career

Emergency Operations Coordinator

An Emergency Operations Coordinator (EOC) is a first-line supervisor of dispatchers or logistics coordinators at the geographic or national level. EOCs help set staff work schedules and make work assignments. EOCs make decisions on the commitment of firefighting resources during periods of competition for resources. They also determine how best to meet requests when fires need scarce or out-of-area resources.

Intelligence Coordinator

Intelligence coordinators work at geographic area or national coordination centers and support those centers' clients by collecting weather, fuels and fire behavior information and packaging it for managers' use. They also collect and present information for partner agencies, news media, elected officials, and the public.

Coordination Center Manager (Local, Regional or National)

The Coordination Center Manager is responsible for the strategic and day-to-day operation of a dispatch center, including budget, staffing, hours of operation, communication equipment needs, developing dispatch protocols and policies, and compliance with relevant agency regulations and policies. Since wildland fire dispatch centers are interagency, center managers also must have the ability to negotiate and satisfy divergent needs from partners. Center managers make decisions on the coordinated movement of firefighting resources, especially when movement of resources involves high costs or may hamper the sending unit's sense of fire preparedness.

Other career tracks

Prevention

Individuals working in this arena work at local, regional or geographic areas. They work with partners and other affected groups to prevent unauthorized ignition of wildland fires. This type of work is done through prevention and inspection programs. They develop prevention plans that connect with natural resource and fire management plans and inform / educate the public about fire prevention actions and measures.

Fire ecology

These are individuals with expertise in vegetation and fire ecology addressing a wide range of ecological issues. They collect, analyze, and interpret data supporting fire, natural resource, and landscape level planning input. They provide technical assistance working with: geographic information systems, environmental compliance plans, and reestablishing fire as ecological process. They carry out studies, field reviews, and provide technical assistance on developing reference conditions and desired future conditions for use in planning and implementation. They conduct fire monitoring and modeling, including evaluations of fire behavior, fuel loading, fire effects, and severity.

Training

These individuals organize and manage training, coordination, and oversight for fire and emergency response. They develop, update, evaluate, and implement standards, curriculum, and coordinate training strategies. This includes classroom, drill, and simulation instruction through the coordination of advance level training academies. They support recruitment efforts and maintain records and certifications. These individuals work with the latest information and developments with fire management (protocols, equipment, etc).

Safety

These individual ensure basic training, refreshers, and wildland fire direction (orders, watchouts, etc) are in place organizationally and operationally. They are experts in risk management, hazard mitigation, hazard analysis, safety operations, and accident investigations. They are involved in assessing fatalities that may address turnovers, vehicle/aircraft accident, heart attacks, or other. They are concerned with day to day safety but in a fire situation focus on escape routes, safety zones, hazards, transportation, medical care and evacuation, and other risks addressing things such as; qualifications, duty hours, fatigue, injuries/illnesses, and maintenance.

Fire business

This is a wide field of individuals ranging from administrative personnel, contracting, electronic and weather specialists, information technology, program analysts, managers, assistant directors, division chiefs, and directors. These and many other individuals provide key information, support, and leadership in providing for wildland fire management activities and program direction.